

MARVEL[®]
COMICS
GROUP



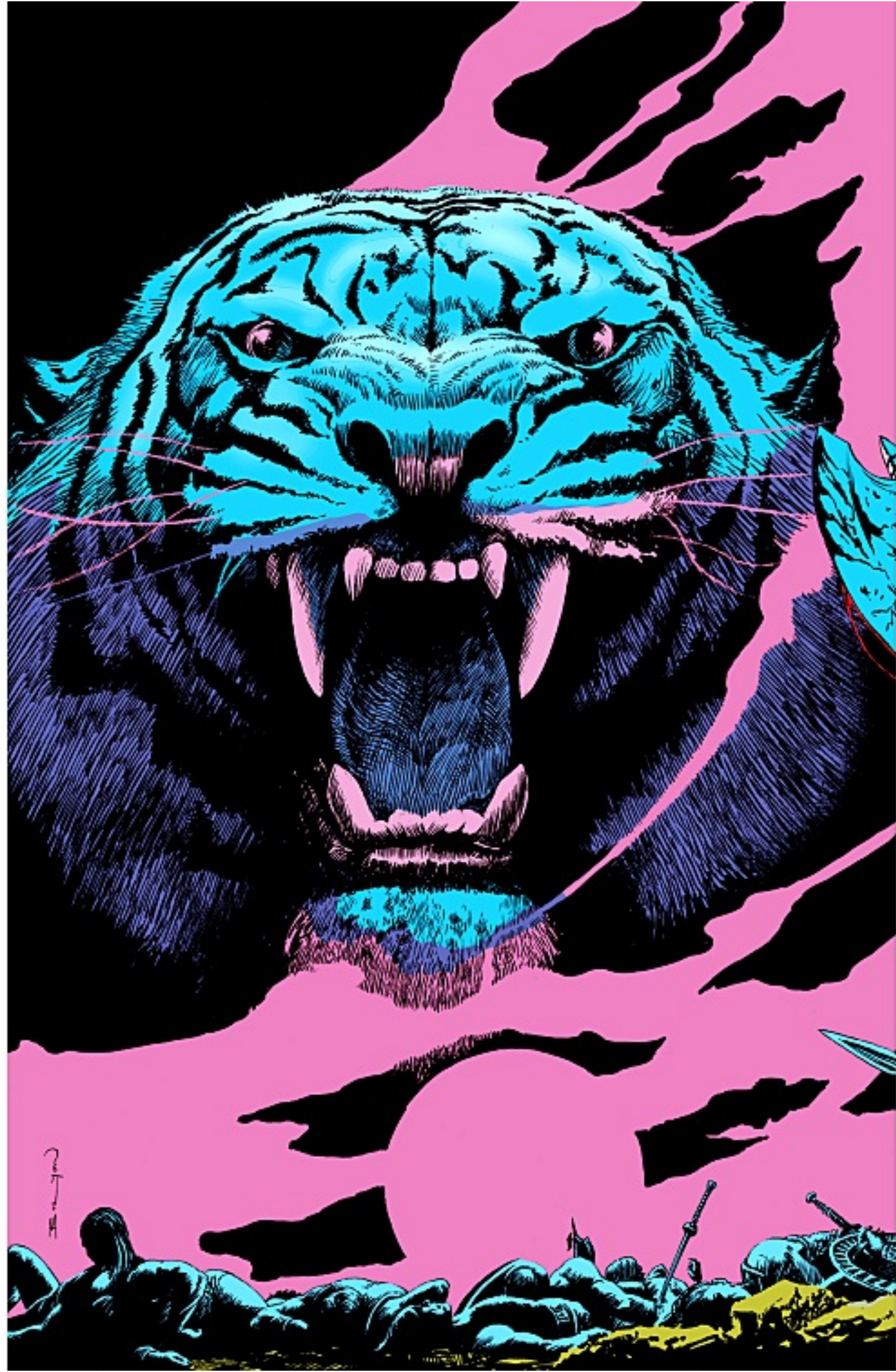
#1

© 1982 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

KULL

THE CONQUEROR[™]





MARVEL[®]
COMICS
GROUP



#1

© 1982 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

KULL

THE CONQUERORTM



Of that epoch known by the Nemedian chroniclers as the Pre-Cataclysmic Age, little is known except the latter part, and that is veiled in the mists of legendry. The Thurian civilization was crumbling; their armies were composed largely of barbarian mercenaries. Picts, Atlanteans, and Lemurians were their generals, their statesmen, often their kings. And the greatest of these kings was Kull...

(Adapted from "The Hyborian Age" by Robert E. Howard)

THE THURIAN CONTINENT in the time of KING KULL CIRCA 15,000 B.C.



the power and the kingdom

AT FIRST THERE WAS A FAINT RUMBLING HEARD ONLY HERE IN THE OUTSKIRTS, THEN A DEAFENING ROAR THAT STOPPED MEN IN THEIR TRACKS FOR MILES AROUND, AYE, EVEN IN THE VERY HEART OF THE CITY OF WONDERS, AND THEN THE EARTH ITSELF-- AS THOUGH BLOOD HUNGRY AFTER UNTOLD AGES OF WEARY EXISTENCE-- UPEHEVED, OPENED OF A SUDDEN ITS DEEP BLACK MAWS AND GORGED ITSELF UPON MEN AND TREES, MOUNTAINS AND BUILDINGS. IN MOMENTS, THIS OUTLYING DISTRICT-- ITS TEMPLES, HOMES, AND MARKET PLACES-- WAS REDUCED TO RUBBLE, AND NOW VALUSIA, A LAND ALREADY GIVEN TO DREAMS OF BYGONE GLORY, WILL POSSESS YET MORE DIM MEMORIES IN PLACE OF PAST GRANDEUR.

STILL, MEN MUST ATTEND TO THE PRESENT! BRULE THE SPEAR-SLAYER MOVES NIMBLY THROUGH THE WRECKAGE-- NO MISTAKING THE SAVAGE PICTISH GAIT IN THIS, KULL'S MOST TRUSTED FRIEND, EVER SINCE THE DAY THEY MET YEARS GONE-- IT WAS SOON AFTER KULL HAD SLAIN THE TYRANT KING BORNA AND CLAPPED THE BLOODY VALUSIAN CROWN TO HIS OWN BARBARIAN BROW-- THE TWO MEN HAVE BEEN NIGH INSEPARABLE, LIKE TWO GREAT FIERCE-EYED CATS, STALKING THE FORCES OF DARKNESS.

NOW, IN THE SCRAMBLE TO AID SURVIVORS OF THE QUAKE, BRULE HAS LOST SIGHT OF THE KING. BUT A VAGUE RUMBLING IS AGAIN IN THE AIR, THE GROUND BEGINS TO TREMBLE ONCE MORE-- THE KING MAY BE IN DANGER, SHOULD NOT BE OFF ALONE--

NAME OF SEVEN DEVILS! WHERE IS LORD KULL?! WHERE IS THE KING?!

the king who would be king

CHAPTER ONE

ALAN ZELENETZ - SCRIPTER
JOHN BUSCEMA - PENCILER
DANNY BULANADI - INKER
MARIE SEVERIN - COLORIST
JANICE CHIANG - LETTERER
DENNIS O'NEIL - EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER - ED-IN-CHIEF

JOHN BOLTOW - COVER PENCILER & INKER

MEANWHILE, THE OBJECT OF BRULE'S FRANTIC OUTCRY IS ATOP A NEARBY HILL.

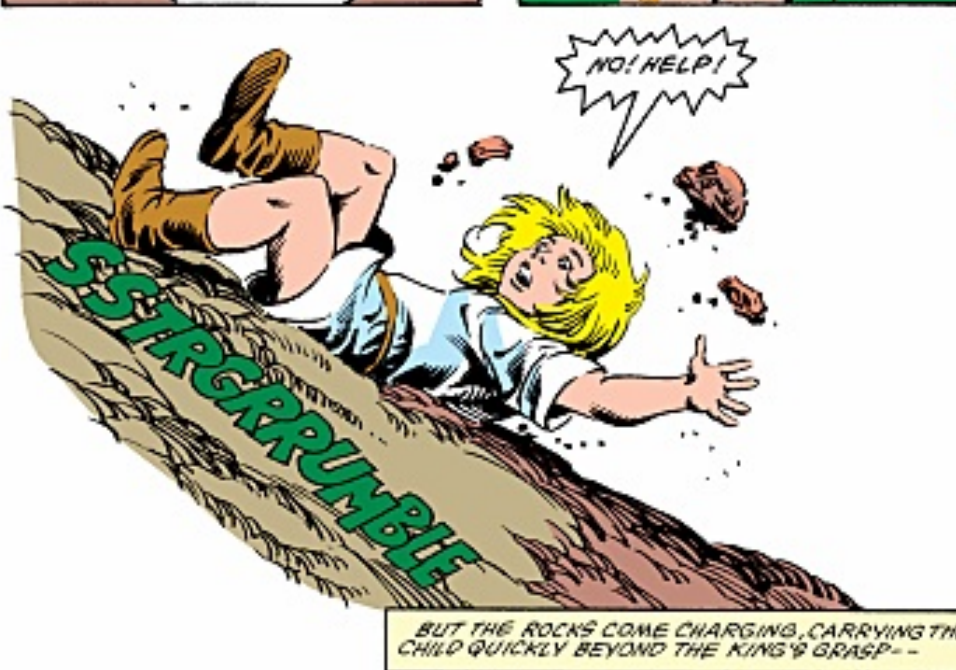


WHOA, LAD, AND BE STILL. THIS TRUNK-- UNH-- IS NO HEAVIER THAN THE GREAT BOULDERS WHICH-- UNH-- IN MY YOUTH, I TOSSED FOR SPORT FROM THE UPPERMOST PEAKS OF ATLANTIS INTO THE SEA.

WITH EVERY SINOW STRAINING, KULL PRESSED...



VALKA BLESS YOU, SIR!



BUT THE ROCKS COME CHARGING, CARRYING THE CHILD QUICKLY BEYOND THE KING'S GRASP--





IT SEEMS 'TIS YOU AND NOT I BEARS THE MORE WATCHING, FRIEND!

STILL, MY POINT IS THUS PROVEN--

FOR HAD YOU NOT BEEN NEAR, MY LORD, YOU'D FOR CERTAIN HAVE LOST YOUR PICTISH EMISSARY!

YOU'LL FORGIVE ME, MY LORD, BUT A MONARCH SIMPLY MUST NOT GO OFF ALONE LIKE THAT, OH NO! YOUR ROYAL RESPONSIBILITY TO ALL VALUSIA PROHIBITS YOUR RISKING YOURSELF SO. YOU ARE, AFTER ALL, KING NOW AND MUST LEAVE BEHIND THE RECKLESS GLADIATOR AND FREE-SPIRITED SOLDIER OF YOUR PAST.

HAS THE KING, THEN LESS FREEDOM THAN THE LOW-LIEST FOOTMAN IN THE BLACK LEGIONS, EH, TU?



AND SOON, AT THE ROYAL ENCAMPMENT BELOW...

THE RUIN IS INDEED GREAT, BRULE. THESE PEOPLE WILL NEED TO BE FED AND QUARTERED BY NIGHTFALL.



SAY, TU, HAVE I NOT THE MAKINGS OF AN EPIC POEM TO CHRONICLE HERE? "OF GREAT CATASTROPHE I SING, AGAINST WHICH VALUSIAN STEEL WAS AS NOTHING... AND ONLY THE STEADFAST RESOLVE OF THE KINGS!!

NOW HUSH, RIDONDO. THANK VALKA, HERE HE IS AT LAST, LORD KING--

THAT I AM, CHIEF COUNCILOR.



IF I MAY DIGRESS, MY LIEGE, YOUR LEARNED MEN HAVE DE-LIBERATED UPON THE CAUSE OF THIS GREAT DISASTER.



"CERTAIN OF THEM DO HOLD IT WAS SOME GIANT MOLE BURROWING UP FROM BENEATH THE GROUND WHICH BROKE THE EARTH TO SWALLOW WHAT WAS ABOVE...

"... WHILE OTHERS MAINTAIN IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE MONSTROUS CHILDREN OF THE EARTH GODDESS HERSELF SEEKING THE SURFACE WORLD TO GORGE THEMSELVES ON MEN?..."



"... STILL THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THE ANCIENT GODS, ENRAGED, DID ROUSE A STORM OF THUNDER AND LIGHTNING WITHIN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH? AND--?"



OR MAYHAPS NATURE HERSELF SUFFERS SIMPLE GROWING PAINS? ASK MY SCHOLARS THAT, COME, I WISH TO SURVEY THE DAMAGE.

WE GO ALL TOGETHER, MY LIEGE.



YOU PAMPER ME LIKE AN OLD NURSE, TU?

VALUSIA NEEDS A LIVING SOVEREIGN, MY LORD. I AM CONCERNED ONLY FOR YOUR WELFARE AND THE KINGDOM'S.

THE LATE AFTERNOON SUN GLEAMS ABOVE, CASTING AN ORANGE GLOW ACROSS THE WRACK AND RUIN THAT ONLY YESTERDAY WAS A BUZZING SUBURB OF THE CITY OF WONDERS, VALUSIA'S FAR-FAMED CAPITAL.



THE GHOSTLY SILENCE IS BROKEN ONLY BY THE ROYAL PARTY'S FOOT-FALLS ACROSS THE GREY RUBBLE, AND EACH STEP RAISES DUST OF DEBRIS THAT STINGS THE NOSTRIL AND BURNS THE EYE.

WITH A LONG STRIDE OF NATURAL MAJESTY, KULL LEADS HIS MEN TOWARDS THE FALLEN COLONADE OF A DISTRICT TEMPLE, FOR WHO KNOWS, SOME ZEALOUS PRIEST BENT BEFORE THE ALTAR WHEN THE EARTHQUAKE STRUCK MAY YET HAVE SURVIVED WITHIN.

THERE'S A STENCH OF DEATH IN THESE SHADOWS.

AYE, MY LORD, IT MIXES STRANGELY WITH THE SWEET SCENT OF RITUAL INCENSE.

WELL, LET'S SEE IF THERE'S ANY HAVE WITHSTOOD THE TEMPLE'S COLLAPSE. ARE YOU COMING, POET? OR DOES THE SMELL OF CORPSES OFFEND YOUR SENSITIVE NOSE?

I'M AFRAID THE LATTER, MILORD, STILL I'LL COME. I'VE LEARNED TO SUFFER FOR MY CRAFT.



WITH THE SOUNDLESS TREAD OF A FELINE, KULL
PASSES THROUGH THE CAVED-IN WALL OF A SHADOWY
TEMPLE CHAMBER. IS IT INDEED ONLY A DAY SINCE
THIS SANCTUARY HUMMED WITH ACTIVITY AND PRAYER?
NOW, IN RUIN, IT SEEMS BUT THE ILLUSION OF A TEMPLE,
AN UNREAL MOCKERY OF ITS ANCIENT STately SELF.



SUDDENLY...

GRR

HAD HE BEEN FORE-
WARNED OF THE JACKAL'S
PRESENCE, KULL COULD
NOT HAVE TURNED MORE
SWIFTLY...



... BUT THERE IS NO
TIME TO DRAW SWORD
FROM SHEATH...

... MOVING UP AND AROUND
IN ONE MOTION, HE FARRIES
THE LUNGE OF THE FIERY-
EYED BEAST WITH HIS BARE
HANDS.

GRRRWL!

HAI!



AS THEY ROLL IN THE DUST, KULL FEELS THE
HOT BREATH OF THE WILD ANIMAL ON HIS FACE
AND THE SPITTLE OF ITS WET FANGS. THE
JACKAL WAS ATTRACTED BY THE SMELL OF
CARRION, BUT NOW IT WOULD PREFER TO
SET ITS TEETH DEEP INTO THE LIVING ATLAN-
TEAN'S SHOULDER, DRAW BLOOD--

YET THE RED SAVAGE IS
AWAKE IN KULL'S BREAST,
AND ONLY DEATH WILL
SATISFY ITS PRIMAL
RAGE-- HE DIGS HIS
FINGERS INTO THE ANI-
MAL'S NECK...



... THRASHES
THE BEAST
ACROSS THE
COLD STONE
FLOOR...

... THEN SWINGS ITS
THROBBING FORM
THROUGH THE AIR.



... AND DASHES THE NEAR-LIFELESS BODY AGAINST A SOLID PILLAR.



HAD IT KNOWN WHAT MANNER OF STEELY-NERVED WARRIOR IT WAS OPPOSING, PERHAPS THE JACKAL MIGHT HAVE FOREGONE ITS DESIRE FOR WARM FLESH...



... LITTLE MATTER, THIS BEAST WILL NOT HUNGER AGAIN.

I FEAR, MY LORD, THAT HAD WE NOT PERMITTED MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS SUCH AS THESE TO FALL INTO DISREPAIR OVER THESE LAST YEARS, PERHAPS THE QUAKE MAY NOT HAVE DAMAGED THEM SO, YOU SEE--

I'VE SEEN ENOUGH THIS DAY, TU! BY VALKA, LET'S BACK TO THE PALACE, FOR THERE'S MUCH I WOULD THINK OVER.



THE INSCRUTABLE EYES, GREY LIKE THE ICE CAVES OF THE NORTH, AND THE IMMOBILE FEATURES REVEAL NOTHING OF KULL'S INNERMOST THOUGHTS. NOW, HE DECIDES, IS THE TIME TO REBUILD. NOW, AFTER THE QUAKE, TO REFASHION THE CITY IN HIS OWN IMAGE. IN THIS MANNER WILL HE BEQUEATH HIS NAME AND CREATE A MEMORIAL MORE LASTING THAN THE SPURIOUS BLOODLINE OF KINGS.



HE WILL WIN THE VALUGIAN PEOPLE'S TRUST AND RESPECT YET! YES, THERE WILL BE REFORMS-- POLITICAL AND SOCIAL-- TO GO WITH THE LARGE-SCALE CIVIC PROJECTS. CERTAINLY THIS WILL JUSTIFY HIM AS KING. YES, HE WILL DO IT! FOR, AFTER ALL, ARE NOT HIS THE POWER AND THE KINGDOM?

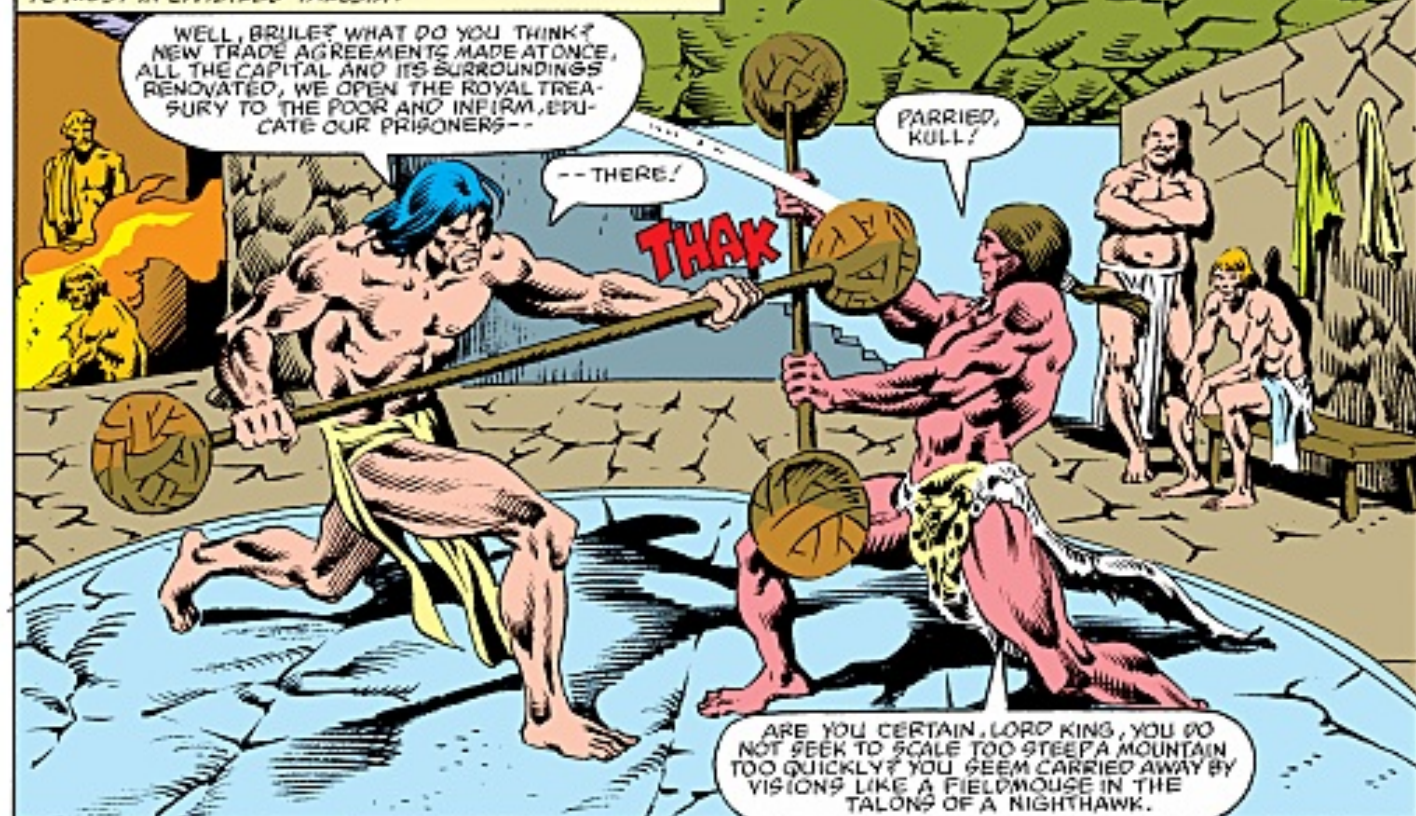
THAT EVENING, IN A PRIVATE CHAMBER OF THE ROYAL PALACE IN THE CITY OF WONDERS, THE ROOM IS FRAGRANT WITH THE PERFUME OF LATE SUMMER SPICE TREES CARRIED THROUGH OPEN WINDOWS ON A WARM BREEZE FROM GARDENS BELOW. THE WALLS ARE BEDECKED WITH RICHLY COLORED DRAPERIES AGAINST WHICH THE PINK FLESH OF THE SERVING GIRLS GLIMMERS LIKE OPAL. A PARROT SQUAWKS. WINE CARAFES ARE POURED.



BUT KULL IS OBLIVIOUS TO THIS MEDLEY OF SENSUAL DELIGHTS. FOR THE KING IS WRAPPED IN THOUGHTS THIS NIGHT.

INDEED, TU IS RIGHT. SO MUCH HAS BEEN LEFT IN DISREPAIR. AND HE-- WHAT KIND OF KING HAS HE BEEN, AFTER ALL, THIS ATLANTIAN UPSTART, OUTCAST AND DISOWNED BY HIS OWN SEA MOUNTAIN TRIBE FOR BREAKING THEIR MERCILESS CODE, AND NEVER TRULY ACCEPTED BY HIS ADOPTED VALUGIAN SUBJECTS WHO RESENT THE BARBARIAN USURPER SITTING THEIR CIVILIZED THRONE?

THE NEXT MORNING, IN THE PALACE GYMNASIUM, KING AND EMISSARY PLAY FIERCELY AT TRIBAL GAMES UNFAMILIAR TO MOST IN CIVILIZED VALUSIA.



ARE YOU CERTAIN, LORD KING, YOU DO NOT SEEK TO SCALE TOO STEEP A MOUNTAIN TOO QUICKLY? YOU SEEM CARRIED AWAY BY VISIONS LIKE A FIELD MOUSE IN THE TALONS OF A NIGHTHAWK.

BUT THESE ARE *SUCH* VISIONS, SPEAR-SLAYER! VALUSIA'S CAPITAL WILL BE A LIGHT TO ALL NATIONS, THE CROWN JEWEL OF CITIES!

YOU ASSUME ALL OTHER LANDS WISH TO BE LED OUT OF DARKNESS.

HO!



DON'T YOU SEE, BRULE? WE COMBINE THE FINEST OF THE SAVAGE AND CIVILIZED WORLDS -- NATURAL STRENGTH AND WISDOM WITH LEARNED ELOQUENCE AND STABLE TRADITIONS.



BEGIN SOMEWHERE, IF YOU MUST, BUT DO NOT OVERREACH YOURSELF ALL AT ONCE.

YOUR OWN AMBASSADOR, KA-NU, HAS TOLD ME OFTEN, "GO DREAM, KULL-- YOU HAVE THE POWER TO RESTORE THE LOST GLORIES OF VALUSIA!"



AND SO THE STRONG-WILLED KING, AFIRE WITH VISIONS, PRESSES HIS WAY WITH DAUNTLESS ZEAL. NO! HE WILL NOT BE SWERVED FROM HIS COURSE!

OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, THE SEVENTEEN PRIME COUNCILORS MEET OFTEN IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER.

HERE, THE VOTE GOES AS KULL WOULD HAVE IT, "AYE!"

AND IN THE HALL OF SOCIETY WHERE THE TOPAZ THRONE IS DECKED IN ROYAL ERMINE A REGALLY ROBED KULL, FLUSHED WITH ENTHUSIASM, ANNOUNCES TO ALL ASSEMBLED—

TOMORROW AT DAWN WE BREAK GROUND FOR A NEW CIVIC CENTER IN THE HEART OF OUR CITY OF WONDERS!

BUT LATE AFTERNOON ON THAT MORROW, AFTER HOURS OF LABOR AT THE CENTRAL EXCAVATION SITE, THERE HAS BEEN A SUDDEN HALT TO THE DIGGING...

LISTEN TO ME! NO MAN IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD SET FOOT DOWN IN THAT PIT NO MORE! I'LL WAGER MY MULE AND A DAY'S EARNINGS THAT'S A CURSE CARVED ON THAT DOOR!

TROUBLE NOW! HERE RIDES THE KING LOOKING FIERCE. HE'LL NOT LIKE THIS DELAY ONE BIT!

WHAT'S THIS? I COME ON A TOUR OF INSPECTION AND FIND ALL MY WORKCREW SQUAWKING ABOUT LIKE A BROOD OF FRIGHTENED HENS, REFUSING TO PUT MUSCLE TO THE TASK!



IT'S THE HAUNTED DOOR WE'VE UNCOVERED UNDERGROUND, YOUR MAJESTY. IF WE BURST THROUGH--

BY VALKA'S BONES, I'LL NOT HEAR YOUR SUPERSTITIOUS PRAVEL!

IF THERE'S NO MAN AMONG YOU TO BREAK DOWN THE PORTAL, THEN I'LL HAVE AT IT WITH MY BATTLE AXE!



AND HOTATH PROTECT ANY WRETCH AMONG YOU WHO FAILS TO SET HIS SHOVEL TO THE GROUND WHEN I'M THROUGH!



FOR THE SPACE OF A MOMENT KULL'S SMOLDERING GREY EYES MEET THE HIEROSLYPHS ETCHED, WHO KNOWS WHEN, ON THE SLAB OF STONE SET AS THE ENTRANCEWAY TO-- TO WHAT? HE CALLS TO THE WORKMEN WHO STAND BREATHLESS ABOVE--

SERPENT-MEN, EH? THEY'VE BEEN VANQUISHED IN THIS LAND BEFORE, AND I'LL NOT HAVE THEIR SORCEROUS IMAGES STAND IN THE WAY OF VALUSIA'S FUTURE GLORY!



THE KING'S MIND IS MADE UP.



THE DOOR SHATTERS INTO GRAVELLY FRAGMENTS...

...AND KULL IS NEARLY KNOCKED OVER BY A BLAST OF AIR COLDER THAN ANY GLACIAL ICE IN THE ROARING SEA OF HIS NATIVE ATLANTIS.



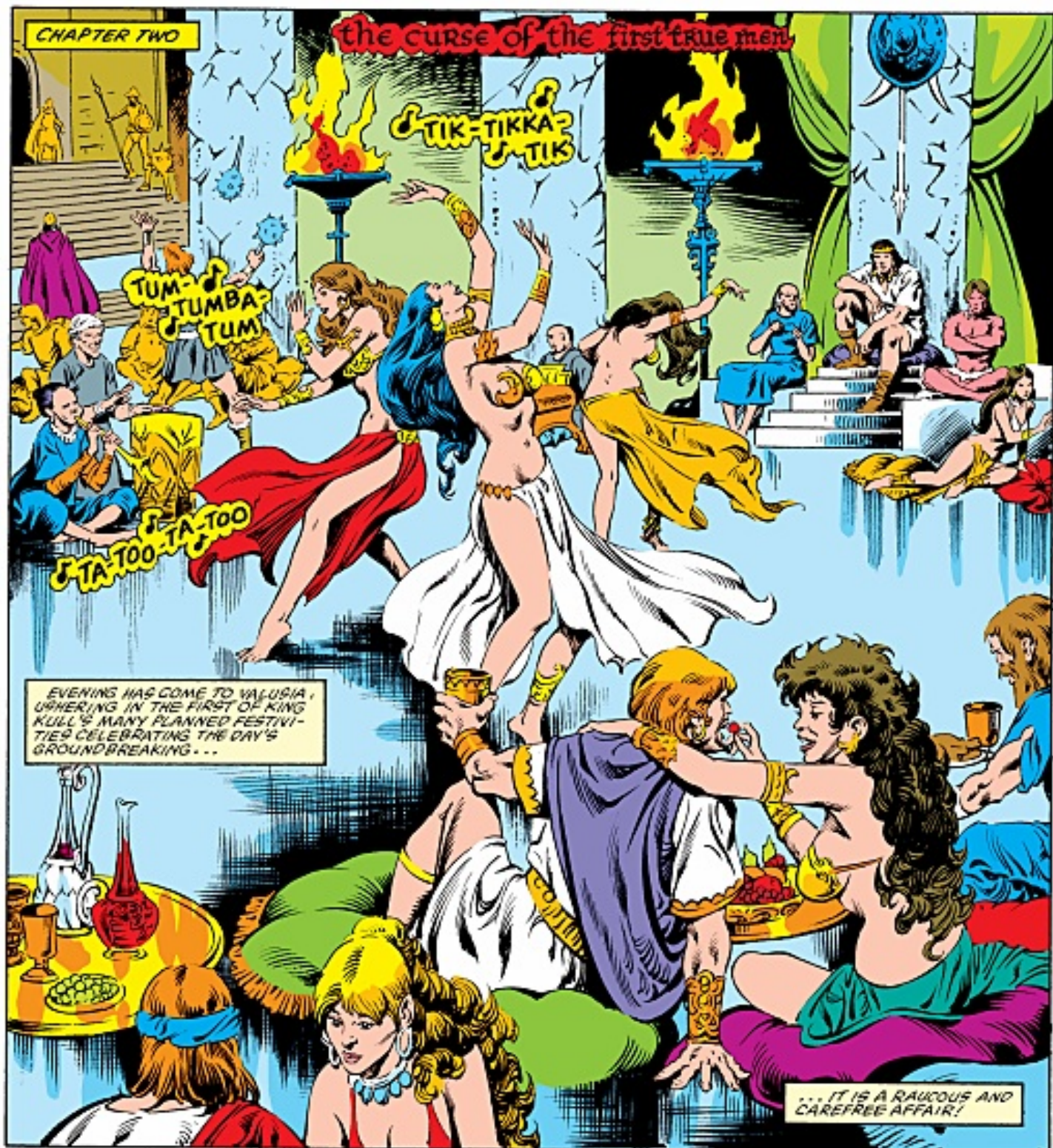
HE ENTERS WITH INSTINCTIVE CAUTION, FOR THOUGH HE DISDAINS COWARDLY SUPERSTITION, YET HE HAS KNOWN THE BITE OF MYSTERIOUS SORCERY AND THE INHUMAN FORCES OF DARKNESS.

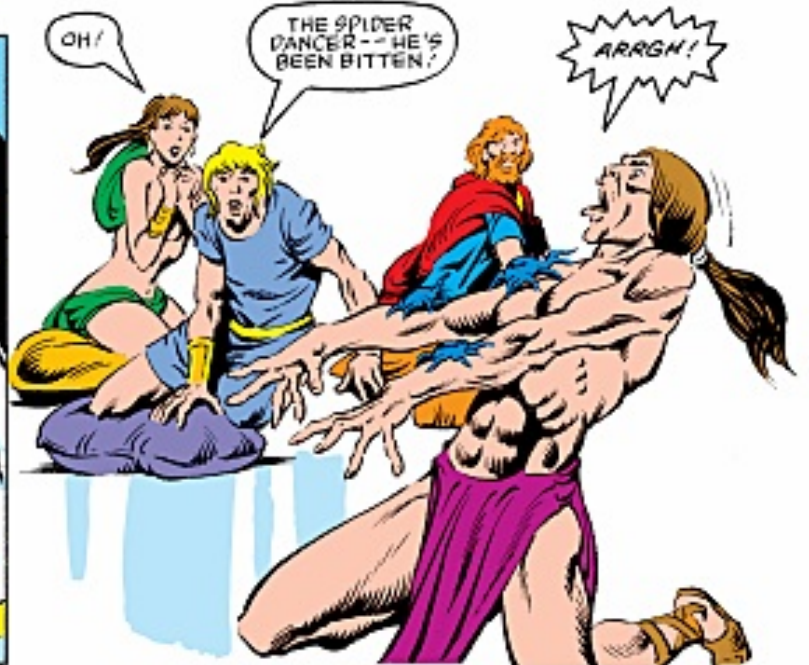


AND HE KNOWS THAT SHADOWS WILL OFTEN HIDE SUBSTANCE, APPEARANCE OFTEN CONCEAL A DEADLY REALITY.

THE ANTECHAMBER IS DARK AND DRAFTY, AND KULL TREADS NOISELESSLY LIKE A GREAT CAT, UP TOWARDS A PORTCULLIS BEHIND WHICH LIES--













NEXT AFTERNOON, IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER...

NAME OF VALKA! THE ANCIENT CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF VALUSIA WILL SHINE BRIGHT IN THE NEW ARMOR WE'VE FORGED FOR THEM THIS LONG MORNING!

YES-- THIS DAY INDEED I KNOW THE TRUE PRIDE OF BEING YOUR KING.



HOLD, SLAYERS! SPEAK, STRANGER, WHO ARE YOU?

RAGMAR, COURT POET OF ZARFHAANA, SIR, PENNILESS BUT FOR MY VERSES, I THROW MYSELF AT YOUR FEET FOR SANCTUARY. IS NOT VALUSIA A PORT OF REFUGE FOR THE OPPRESSED?

THE EMPEROR VARICUS, SLIGHTED BY MY LATEST SATIRE, HAS CONDEMNED ME TO DEATH, FOR NONE MAY CRITICIZE THE KING, IT SEEMS, EVEN IN JEST.



KULL LISTENS THOUGHTFULLY TO THE FLEA AND IS REMINDED OF A FAIR-HAired GIRL TIED TO A FIERY STAKE IN THE SEA MOUNTAINS OF ATLANTIS YEARS GONE. SHE HAD BEGGED THEN, TOO, LIKE THIS RAGMAR, BUT SILENTLY, WITH HER EYES ONLY...



... AND THOUGH KULL COULD NOT FREE HER FROM THE HEMPEN KNOTS THAT BOUND HER, HIS SWIFT DAGGER DID FREE HER SPIRIT FROM THE TORTURE OF THE SLOW-RISING FLAMES. HERE NOW WAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO GRANT FREEDOM IN LIFE, AND, BY VALKA'S BLOOD, HE WOULD DO IT!

EMISSARIES OF THE ZARFHAANIAN KING, MY LIEGE!

GREETINGS FROM VARICUS OF ZARFHAANA TO KULL OF VALUSIA!



YOUR LORDSHIP, THIS TREASONOUS FUGITIVE, RAGMAR HAS BEEN FOUND GUILTY IN OUR LAND OF SLANDER AND SEDITION. HE MUST BE SURRENDERED TO OUR HANDS THAT WE MAY DELIVER HIM TO HIS SENTENCE.

DOES KING VARICUS WOBBLE AT THE KNEES OVER A POET'S RHYMES?

NOT SO HERE. VALUSIA WELCOMES POETRY AND HONORS MEN'S PERSONAL FREEDOM. RAGMAR MAY SING AND SING TO HIS HEART'S CONTENT IN OUR CITY OF WONDER, FOR I HAVE OFTEN SAID THAT A TRUE POET IS GREATER BY FAR THAN ANY KING.





"...THERE ARE REPORTS THROUGHOUT THE CAPITAL--OUTBURSTS OF MADNESS SIMILAR TO THOSE WHICH MARKED LAST EVENING'S FESTIVITIES. MEN AND WOMEN, FOR NO REASON THAT IS APPARENT, GROW ASHEN, ICY, WILD-EYED, AND VIOLENT..."



SOME DAYS LATER--A MUSTY TAVERN IN ONE OF THE ANTIQUE CITY'S MANY WINDING ALLEYS...



VALK BLAST HIS INVESTIGATIONS! WE KNOW WHAT IT IS, DON'T WE? IT'S DEMONS THAT POSSESS OUR BODIES AND STEAL OUR SOULS FROM US! IT ALL STARTED--WE DIDN'T IT--AFTER HE BROKE INTO THE HAUNTED TOMB!

AYE! THE PAGAN KING'S RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS CURSE ALRIGHT!



WHO NEEDS HIS NEW BUILDINGS AND COINS FROM HIS TREASURY WHEN HE BRINGS MISFORTUNE ON US CITIZENS?!



AND WHO'S THIS STRANGER RAGMAR THAT VALUSIA MUST DEFEND AN OUTLANDER'S FREEDOM TO ROAM OUR CITY?



AYE! HE'LL BRING US A CURSE, TOO--BLOODSHED AND WAR--MARK MY WORD!



MEANWHILE, KULL'S COUNCILORS ARE REPORTING TO THEIR MONARCH...

IT IS, INDEED, WE FEAR, CONFIRMED AS THE PEOPLE MURMUR, YOUR HIGHNESS, FOR WE HAVE INSPECTED THE CATACOMBS...



"... AND DECIPHERED THE HIEROGLYPHS THAT WERE ON THE PORTAL YOU SHATTERED...



"... THE CHAMBERS, WHICH, MY LIEGE, YOU DID--UHH--DISTURB WERE AN ANCIENT BURIAL GROUNDS FOR THE FIRST TRUE MEN..."

"... WHO, AS YOU KNOW, WAGED LONG AND TERRIBLE WAR AGAINST THE GRISLY ELDER RACE--THOSE SNAKE-PEOPLE, DEMONS, AND WOLF-MEN, WHO, DEAD CENTURIES AGO, RULED THE WORLD!"



"THOUGH THE TRUE MEN WERE VICTORIOUS, MANY OF THEM SURVIVED ONLY TO SUCCEED TO MADNESS, HAVING LOST THEIR MINDS TO THE HORRORS THEY CONFRONTED IN COMBAT WITH THE HIDEOUS MONSTERS...



"... THESE MADMEN WERE BURIED IN THE TOMBS THAT NOW LIE UNDERNEATH THE RECENT EXCAVATION SITE. BUT EVEN IN DEATH THEIR FRENZIED SPIRITS COULD NOT REST, OFTEN THEY SHRIEKED IN UNHOLY FEAR. SOME CRIED THE SECRET WATCHWORDS OF TRUE MEN, 'KA NAMA KAA LAJERAMA' AS PROTECTION AGAINST THE SERPENT-MEN."

THOSE SPIRITS WERE RELEASED IN THE ICY BLAST WHEN YOUR AXE SHIVERED THE STONE DOOR ON WHICH WAS CARVED IN PETROGLYPHS THE CURSE...

"... HE WHO TRESPASSES BEYOND THIS PORTAL SHALL SUMMON FORTH ENEMIES WITH-OUT AND ENEMIES WITHIN..."



WITCHCRAFT AND MUMMERY! EVEN IF WHAT YOU TELL ME IS TRUE, HOW DO I FIGHT THIS... THIS CURSE, TU? INDEED, I HAVE BATTLED SORCERY, BUT ALWAYS OF BLOOD AND FLESH LIKE THULSA DOOM WHO DARED ONCE TO STEAL THIS CROWN. STILL, FROM HIS BONY CARCASS, I COULD WREST IT!

BUT WHAT SWORD CAN CUT DOWN GHOSTLY SPIRITS AND ICY VAPORS OF FOG AND AIR?

I CANNOT SAY, MY KING.



WE MUST SEEK WISDOM IN THIS MATTER WHERE IT MAY BE FOUND, LORD KULL. SOME MAGE OR NECROMANCER MUST DIVINE THE ANSWER TO UNRIDDLE OUR PREDICAMENT.



THE COUNCILORS DEPART IN SILENCE. KULL ALONE REMAINS, BROODING. THOUGHTS OF MAGIC AND PHANTOMS WEND THROUGH HIS MIND, VEXATIOUS THOUGHTS TO ONE USED TO MEETING A SOLID FOE WITH RINGING STEEL.



WAS IT A REAL CURSE, THEN, AND WAS HE RESPONSIBLE? IS THIS WHERE ALL HIS GLORIOUS PLANS ARE LEADING? WITCHCRAFT AND MUMMERY!

SOME DAYS LATER, IN A HIDDEN WORKSHOP NEAR KULL'S ANCIENT PALACE, A DARKLY BEAUTIFUL ENCHANTRESS Dabbles IN SHADOWY ARTS.



SHE IS OPIRA, WIFE OF EMANDAX, A STRONG-THEWED BUT DULL-WITTED SOLDIER OF THE KING.

CHAPTER THREE

A witch woman of the red slayers



AT LAST I HAVE MASTERED THE SPELL OF METAMORPHOSIS!



AND WITH A FEW ARCAIC SYLLABLES, SHE TRANSFORMS THE STRUTTING ROOSTER...

... INTO A WRIGGLING LIZARD.



NOW, MY PETS, IF I COULD BUT COMMAND THE ESSENCE OF EACH LIVING CREATURE AND DRAW YOUR POWERS THROUGH MY OWN LUMBS...



... AS IT'S WHISPERED KULL CAN DO. MEN SWEAR THEY'VE SEEN THE IMAGE OF A HUGE STRIPED CAT ENTER HIS BODY AND INFUSE HIM WITH ITS SPIRIT.

IF I COULD CLASP THE KING BUT ONCE IN LOVE'S EMBRACE, HIS POWER WOULD BECOME MINE!



STILL PLAYING WITH YOUR MAGIC CHARMS, MY SILLY BEAUTY, EH?

MOCK NOT, EMANDAX. THIS MOUSE WAS ONCE AN ORPHAN BOY. WHAT NEWS?

THE KING WILL SEE YOU COME MORNING.

OH!

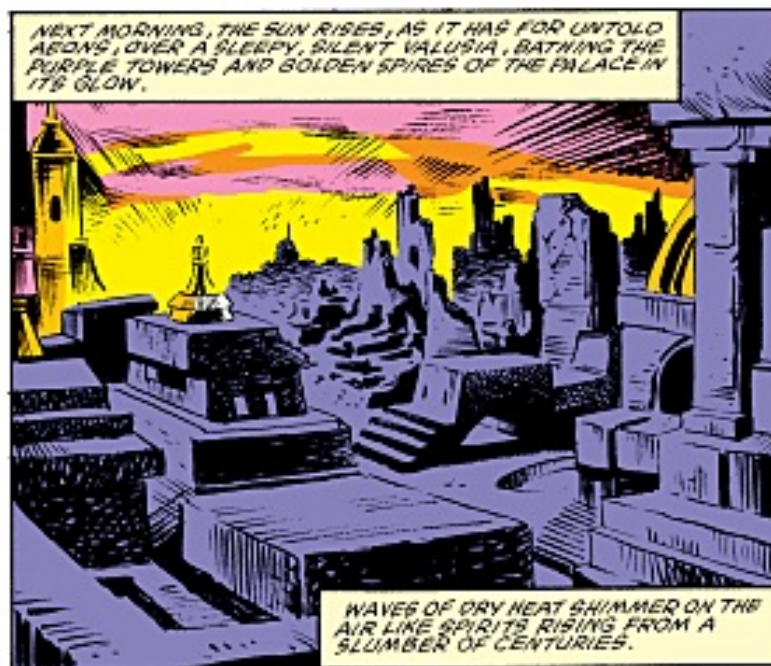
AYE, THE COURT'S AT ITS WIT'S END WITH THE CURSE OF THE TOMB--

WONDERFUL! THEN THE KING'S DISDAIN FOR SORCERY YIELDS TO DESPERATE NEED AS I HOPED!



HA! HA! AND SO, MY PRETTY ONE, YOU'LL EXORCISE HIS DEMON IF KULL PROMISES TO PROMOTE ME TO CAPTAIN OF THE RED PLAYERS, EH?

CERTAINLY, MY LOVE, AM I NOT ALWAYS THINKING OF YOU?



NEXT MORNING, THE SUN RISES, AS IT HAS FOR UNTOLD AEONS, OVER A SLEEPY, SILENT VALUSIA, BATHING THE PURPLE TOWERS AND GOLDEN SPIRES OF THE PALACE IN ITS GLOW.

WAVES OF DRY HEAT SHIMMER ON THE AIR LIKE SPIRITS RISING FROM A SLUMBER OF CENTURIES.



WHILE WITHIN THE PALACE WALLS, RAGMAR WAKENS, YAWNS, AND STRETCHED TOWARDS ANOTHER DAY IN THIS NEW LAND.

THE THREATS OF WAR COMING FROM HIS NATIVE ZARFHAANA THESE LAST FEW DAYS ARE OF LITTLE INTEREST TO HIM. HE'S MANAGED, IN SHORT TIME, TO GET A ROOF OVER HIS HEAD, FOOD IN HIS BELLY, AND ALL THE SAFETY OF THE KING'S CASTLE! LET THEM FIGHT. WHEN THE BATTLE'S OVER, IF KULL HAS LOST, WELL, ENOUGH TIME THEN TO WORRY.



AS HE STROLLS IDLY ABOUT THE CHAMBER, HIS FOOT'S EYE IS CAUGHT BY THE PLAY OF SUNLIGHT AGAINST AN ORNAMENTAL DESIGN ON A WALL POST.

HE TOUCHES THE WOOD, AND, TO HIS GREAT SURPRISE...



... A PANEL SLIDES OPEN!

WHY IT'S SOME SECRET STAIRWAY!



HA! THIS IS INDEED A CITY OF WONDERS!

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE IN THE WAKING PALACE...

ONCE MORE THIS NIGHT, ONE GREAT MOANING WENT UP FROM OUR PEOPLE! MORE CITIZENS POSSESSED! LORD KING, THIS IS A GREAT CALAMITY-- CHILDREN EYE THEIR FATHERS WITH FEAR, HUSBANDS THEIR WIVES--



OFIRA, THE ENCHANTRESS, MY LIEGE!



HOLD THEN, TU. PERHAPS THIS WIFE OF THE RED GLAYER EMANDAX WILL BE OF ASSISTANCE.

YOU ARRIVE WITH THE DAWN, WOMAN.



I AM ANXIOUS TO SPEAK WITH YOU, MY LORD. YET, MAY WE HAVE STRICT PRIVACY?

AFTER TU DEPARTS THE THRONE ROOM...

IT MUST RANKLE A MAN OF KULL'S NOBILITY AND PROWESS TO STAND BY LIKE A HELPLESS PUP ON A LEASH WHILE FIENDISH SPIRITS SEIZE HIS SUBJECTS.

SPEAK, WOMAN! WHAT IS IT YOU CAN DO?

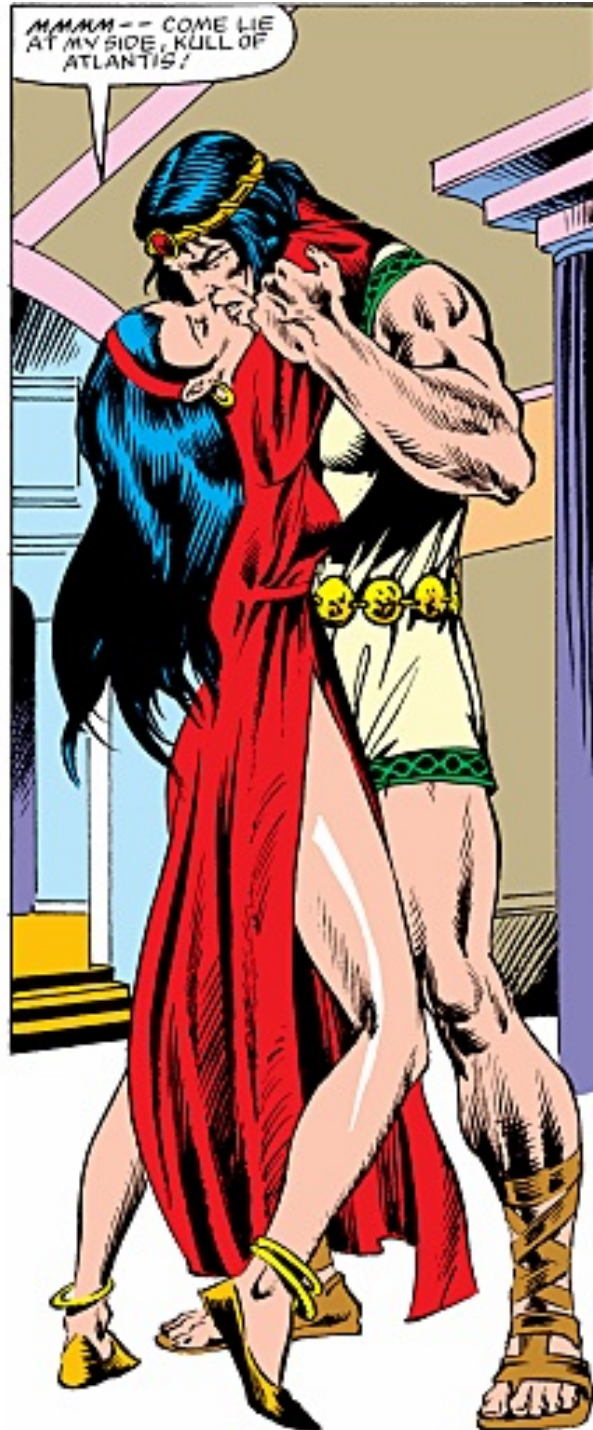


I CAN SAVE THE KINGDOM... IF THE KING WILL YIELD TO ME IN LOVE!



YIELD...





AND LATE THE NEXT NIGHT, AT A ZARFHAANIAN MILITARY ENCAMPMENT NEAR THE BORDER OF VALUSIA, VOICES CAN BE HEARD FROM THE TENT OF KING VARIUS...



-- WILL UNDERMINE THE BLACK LEGIONS WITHIN. REST ASSURED THAT KULL WILL MEET CERTAIN DEFEAT ON THE BATTLEFIELD!

AGREED, OFIRA, AND WITHIN SEVERAL SUNSETS VALUSIA WILL FIND ITSELF AT--



'WAR' IS THE REPORT OF OUR SCOUTS, LORD KULL!

FULL MOBILIZATION IS NECESSARY AT ONCE, YOUR MAJESTY. ALL OTHER ACTIVITIES MUST CEASE!



AYE, ALL MY PLANS NEED BE SUSPENDED 'TIL WE HAVE CHASED THE ZARFHAANIAN CURG YELPING BACK TO THEIR CAPITAL.





HIS EARS ARE PRICKED TOWARDS THE SILENCE. HIS EYES SEARCH THE DARKNESS. THE SMELL OF DANGER HANGS HEAVY IN THIS ROOM...



... IT IS ONE OF THE MANY ROYAL TREASURY CHAMBERS. AHA! THIEVES! THINKS KULL. FOR HERE ARE IVORY, SILVER, AND GOLD, RARE WEAPONS, AND MINTED COINS.

THEN, SUDDENLY, RESPONDING TO SOME PRIMAL INSTINCT...



... KULL WHIRLS JUST AS A FORM EMERGES FROM THE SHADOWS!



AS HE LETS GO THE TORCH, HE SEES ONLY THE GLINT OF A KEEN-EDGED DAGGER UPRaised ABOVE HIS NECK...

BY THE GODS OF THE SEAS, WORM, I KNOW NOT HOW YOU CREPT INTO THE PALACE...



... BUT YOU'LL NOT CRAWL BACK OUT AGAIN!



AND THEN, IN THE SERIE GLOW OF THE DYING TORCHLIGHT, KULL SEES HIS ASSAILANT'S FACE FOR THE FIRST TIME...



AYE, SIR! YOUR CITY OF WONDERS HAS MANY ATTRACTIONS. MY SLEEPING QUARTERS CONTAINED A HIDDEN PASSAGE THAT LED ME HERE.

AND, HAVING BEEN AN IMPOVERISHED POET ALL MY DAYS, I COULD NOT RESIST THE GLITTER, DESPITE YOUR OX OF A GUARD'S PROTESTS!



BUT NEITHER SHALL YOU TAKE ME, KING KULL. I DID NOT FLEE ONE LAND TO BE IMPRISONED IN A SECOND! ALL THE WORSE, FOR I HAD PLANNED VERSES IN PRAISE OF YOUR EARLIER GENEROSITY!



IF IT'S RHYMES YOU'D COMPOSE, POET, THEY'D BEST BE FOR YOUR OWN ELEGY!

HA!



SO, HE HAD REFUSED THE POET TO KING VARICUS ONLY TO TAKE HIS LIFE HIMSELF! NOT EVEN BRULE MUST KNOW OF THIS UNTIL THE BATTLE AGAINST ZAR-FRANNA IS FOUGHT AND WON. AFTER ALL, IT WAS FREEDOM FOR ALL MEN, THEY WOULD BE DEFENDING AND NOT FOR ANY INDIVIDUAL...



THAT NEXT MORNING, A CITY SHOPPING SQUARE BUSTLES WITH EARLY MARKETERS...

CHAPTER FOUR

enemies with enemies w

enemies without,
enemies within

THEN...

NO! KA NAMA HAA--

out,
thin

MEANWHILE, AS THE RABBLE-ROUSERS INCITE THE CROWD, THE BARRACKS OF VALUSIA'S FEARSOME BLACK LEGIONS -- THE MIGHTIEST SOLDIERLY ON ALL THE THURIAN CONTINENT-- BRISTLE WITH ACTIVITY OF THEIR OWN...



... MEN STRAP COLD STEEL AGAINST BROAD THIGHS, SOME POLISH THEIR HELMETS, OTHERS HASTILY PACK GEAR ON RELUCTANT MULES...

... MEN STRAP COLD STEEL AGAINST BROAD THIGHS, SOME POLISH THEIR HELMETS, OTHERS HASTILY PACK GEAR ON RELUCTANT MULES. . .

... STILL OTHERS HUDDLE STEALTHILY ABOUT EMANDAX AND WHISPER FOUL PLOTS OF DARK TREASON.



FOR IF IT ALL GOES AS THESE HAVE PLANNED, VALUSIAN SPEARS WILL TASTE VALUSIAN BLOOD IN THE UPCOMING BATTLE.

AND IN THE NEARBY PALACE, A BELEAGUED KING INVOLVES HIMSELF IN LAST-MINUTE PREPARATIONS OF HIS OWN...



WE'LL NEED THIS NIGHT'S COVER TO GET OUT, THEN ONE DAY'S MARCH--

AYE, MY LIEGE AND ON THE SECONDDAWN WE MEET THE ZARFHAANANS.



IN THE DISTANCE, WAR DRUMS RUMBLE, WHILE AT HOME THE PEOPLE GRUMBLE! LO! THE CURSE COMES TRUE, THE KING MUST RUE-- ENEMIES WITHOUT, ENEMIES WITHIN...



VALKA'S NAME, YOU CAN BE IRKSOME, RIDONDO! BUT GO ON, IT'S THE KING'S LOT TO SUFFER EVERY GADFLY'S STING!

ON THE FIELD, A CRIMSON BATTLE, WHILE AT HOME, DEAD SPIRITS RATTLE! LO! THE CURSE COMES TRUE, THE KING MUST RUE-- ENEMIES WITHOUT, ENEMIES WITHIN...

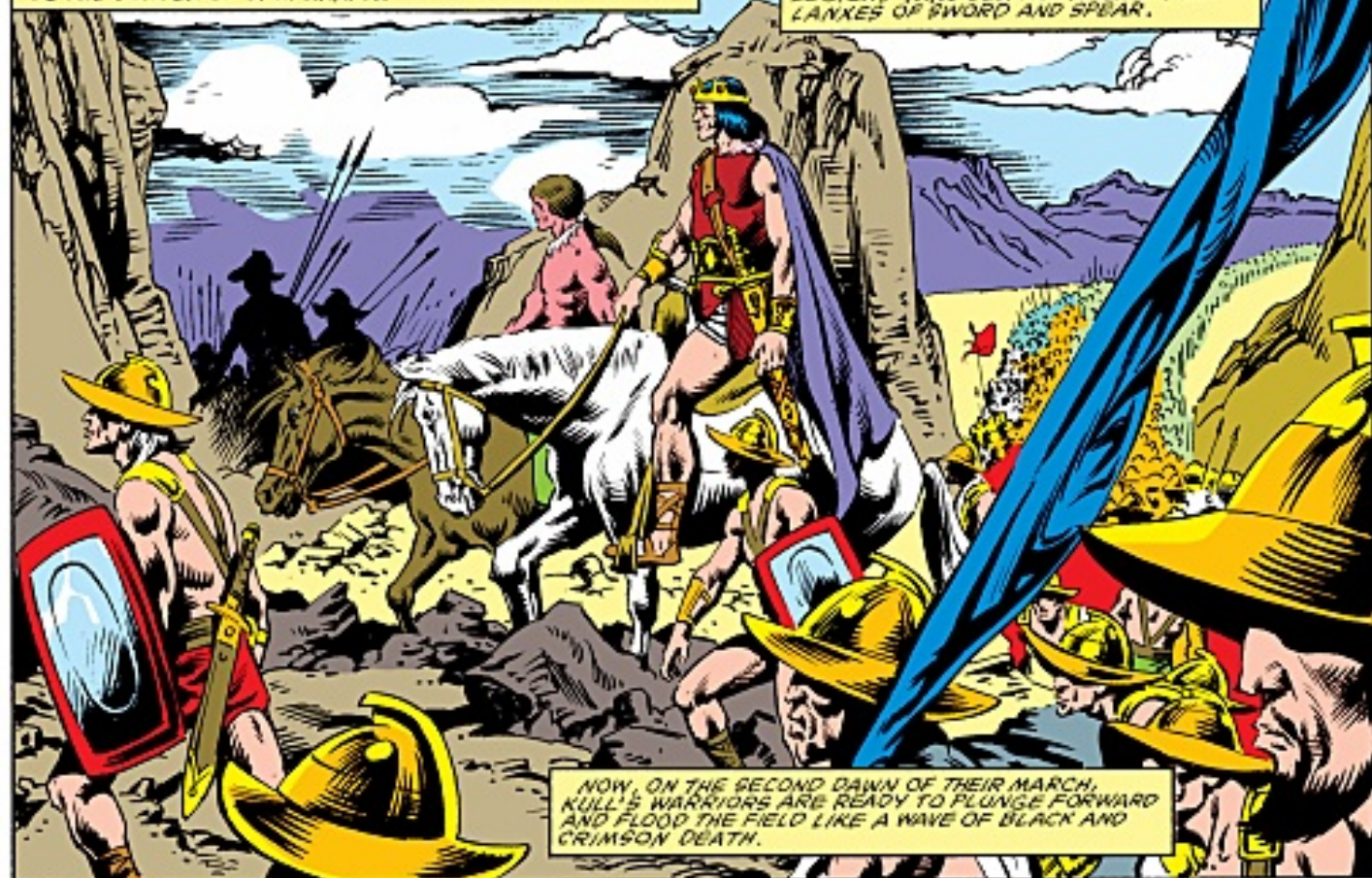






RIDING HIS STALLION LIKE A DEMI-GOD AT THE VANGUARD OF HIS TROOPS, BRULE AT HIS RIGHT HAND, KULL LEADS HIS WARRIORS OVER THE ANCIENT FOOTHILLS OF ZALGARA, EASTWARD ACROSS THE SCORCHING DESERTS OF CAMOON TO THE BORDER OF ZARFHAANA.

LIKE AN ARMORED SERPENT OF BRONZE AND STEEL, HIS RED SLAYERS AND BLACK LEGIONS WIND BEHIND IN THICK PHALANXES OF SWORD AND SPEAR.



NOW, ON THE SECOND DAWN OF THEIR MARCH, KULL'S WARRIORS ARE READY TO PLUNGE FORWARD AND FLOOD THE FIELD LIKE A WAVE OF BLACK AND CRIMSON DEATH.

LITTLE DOES THE KING SUSPECT THE BASE PERFDY THAT FALSE EMANDAX HAS CONTRIVED FROM WITHIN HIS VERY RANKS...



... AND THE BETRAYAL OF HIS KINGDOM BY OFIRA, THE WITCH WOMAN, WHO NOW SITS MOUNTED AT THE HEART-SIDE OF KING VARICUS.

FEAR NOT, MY LIEGE, FOR YOU SHALL SEE KULL'S ARMY BUCKLE TO YOUR OWN BEFORE THE FIRST TWO BLADES ENGAGE!



AND AT LAST, A SPACE OF GREEN SWARD NO MORE THAN A FEW YARDS SEPARATES ZARFHAANAN FROM VALUSIAN.





MY ELK-MEN WILL
AVENGE YOUR SPITE,
TIGER OF ATLANTIS!



IT IS THE WITCH,
BRULE.

AYE, KULL, A
WOMAN
SCORNE!

NOW, MY WARRIORS
OF VALUSIA, TRAMPLE
THE INHUMAN FOE!

KULL'S MEN ARE SEASONED WARRIORS, ACCUSTOMED TO
THRUST AND PARRY, PLUNGE AND CLEAVE. BUT THE INITIAL
SHOCK OF THIS HIDEOUS ADVERSARY CONJURED BY
UNEXPECTED WITCHERY REDUCES THEM TO CRUDE
HACKING. THERE SEEMS LITTLE
ELSE A WARRIOR CAN DO TO
FIGHT THESE INCREDIBLE
MONSTROSITIES!



AND THEN, BEFORE KULL REMEMBERS
THAT THE WITCH'S OWN HUSBAND IS
ONE AMONG HIS MEN, EMANGAX
STRIKES--

NOW!



FIRST WE SEVER
KULL'S RIGHT
ARM!

WHAT!? TREACHERY
IN OUR MIDST!



AND ELSEWHERE ON
THE FIELD OF BATTLE...

BY HOTATH'S GRIM
VISAGE, DIE, FOUL OBSCENITY!
FOR EVEN THE MONSTROUS
UNION OF BOTH MAN AND
BEAST WILL BLEED LIKE
EITHER WHEN PIERCED TO
THE GUT WITH VALUSIAN
STEEL!



THE HILLS AND FIELDS RUN RED; INDEED NO SWORD
NEED THIRST FOR BLOOD TO DRINK THIS DAY!



STILL, THOUGH KULL SLASHES IN PERPETUAL
FURY, NEVER HIMSELF KNOWING THE FEAR
OF DEATH...

IT GOES BADLY
FOR OUR TROOPS!
HURRY, SEN-DOR!
THESE ELK-MEN
POSSESS THE
STRENGTH OF
BRUTES!

I BELIEVE I AM
PREPARED NOW, TU,
THIS CHARM'S AGAINST
THE WITCH HERSELF.

REMEMBER, THOUGH,
IT HAS BEEN SIXTY
SUMMERS SINCE LAST
I WORKED A SPELL OF
METAMORPHOSIS...



"...IT MAY NOT SUCCEED..."



"...BUT IF IT DOES..."



"... THEN THE SORCERESS WILL HER-
SELF BE TRANSFORMED INTO A HARM-
LESS MOUSE..."



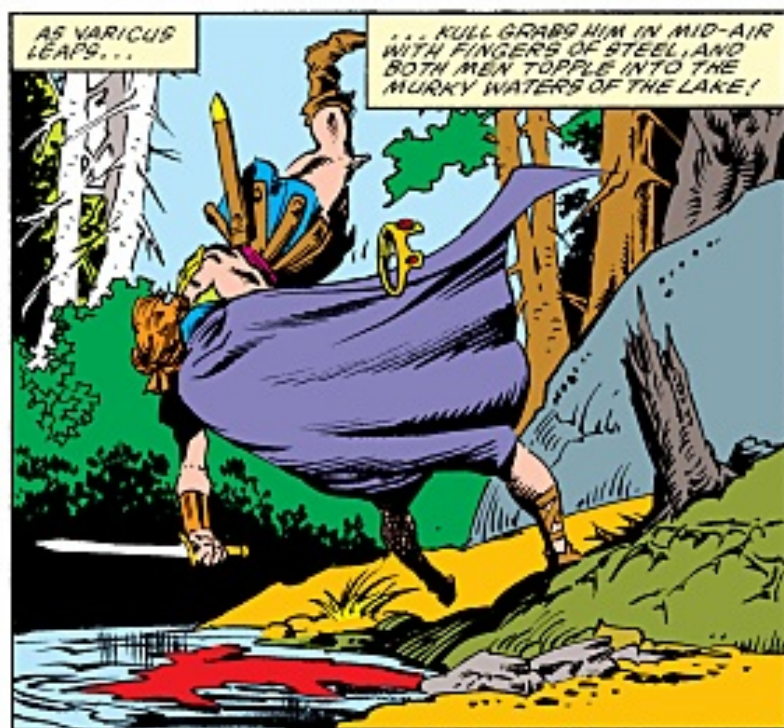
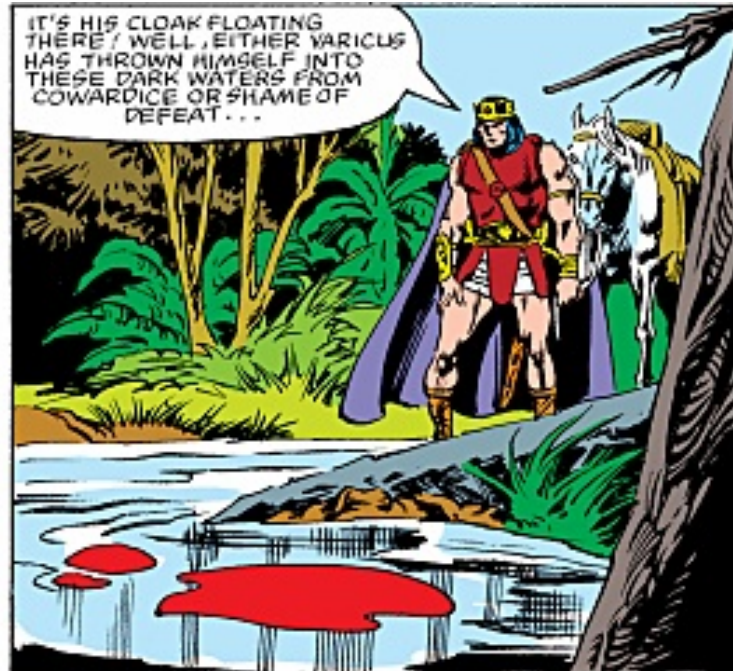
"... AND HER OWN SPELL..."



"... BROKEN!"









RATHER LET HIM HAVE A
TASTE OF PRISON...



... UNTIL HE'S READY TO SUE FOR PEACE.



AS HE CLEARS THE THICKET
BACK ONTO THE BATTLEFIELD...

... KULL SMILES WRYLY IN
SATISFACTION.

VALKA AND HOTATH! MY
SWORD HAS SUNG ITS LAST
MELODY THIS DAY IT SEEMS!
VALUSIA HAS ROUTED
THEIR ARMY!



ZARFHAANA'S
SOLDIERS FLEE LIKE
FRIGHTENED JACK-
RABBITS!



AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG
WHILE, KULL FEELS AGAIN THE FIERY
CONQUEROR'S BLOOD POUNDING
THROUGH HIS VEINS.

THE RETURN TO THE CITY OF WONDERS IS SWIFT-- A GLORIOUS CALVACADE OF HIGH-SPIRITED TROOPS AND BANNERS STREAMING IN THE WIND BOASTS VALURIA'S VICTORY.

SHORTLY THEREAFTER...

THE ROYAL SIGNET HAS BEEN PUT TO THE TREATY, WITH ZARFHAANA, LORD KULL. BUT NOW THAT VARICUS HAS BEEN DEPOSED?--

SET HIM FREE.

WHAT? HE WILL PROMPTLY SEEK REVENGE, MY LORD!

CHAPTER FIVE

monuments
to a king

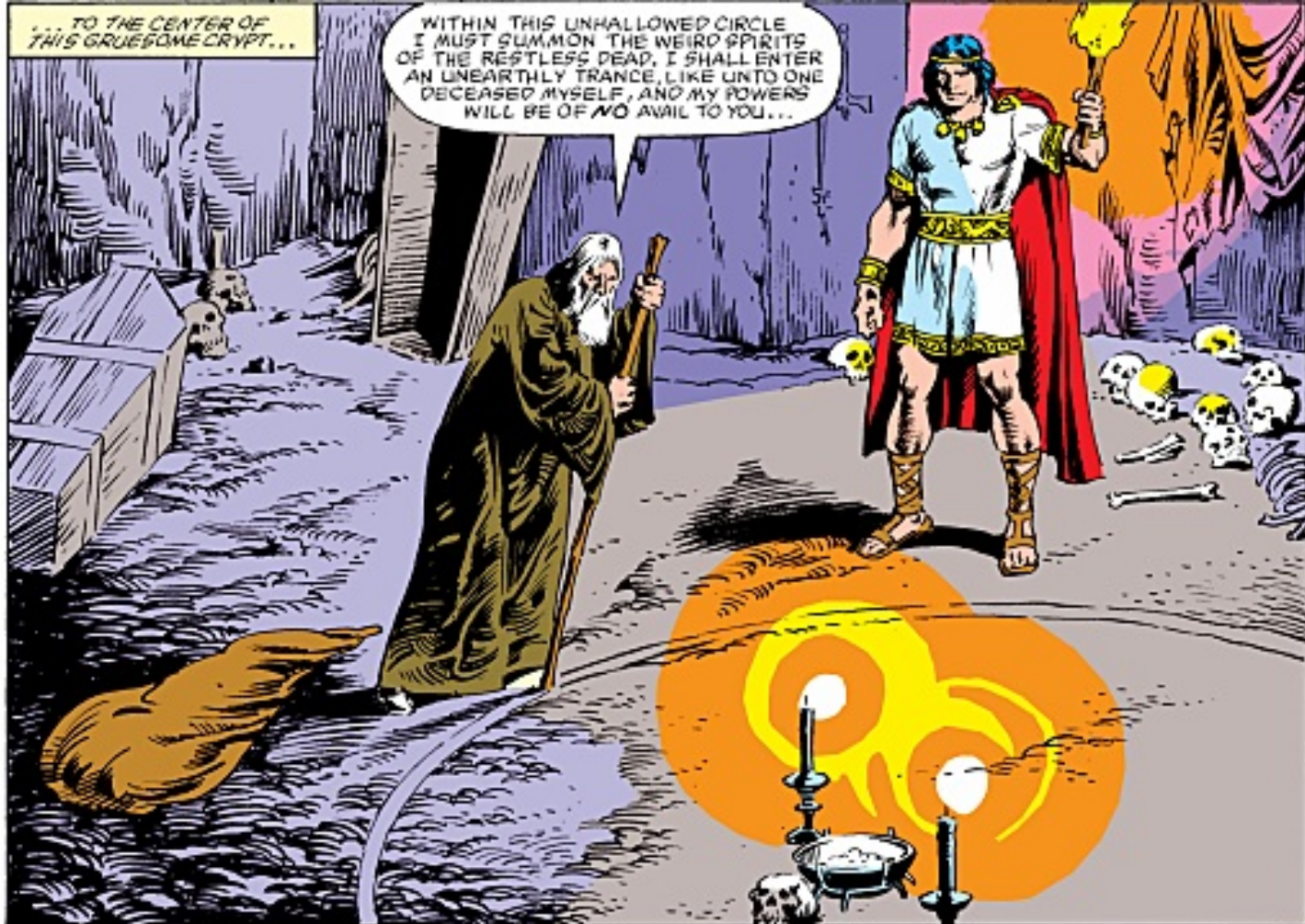
AND SO WE ADD ONE WEASEL MORE TO THE PACK OF OUR ENEMIES.

KULL, YOU'VE WON THE FIRST VICTORY-- THE GREATER BATTLE LIES AHEAD! FOR DEAD SOULS ARE NOT CONQUERED BY MIGHTY SOLDIER. THE MORTAL WHO UNLEASHED THEM MUST VANQUISH THE FRENZIED SPIRITS IN LONE COMBAT.

AND THAT IS YOU, MY LIEGE.

I CAN BUT RECALL THEM TO THE TOMB. KNOW, KULL, THE HOST OF DEMONS WILL STRUGGLE AGAINST SUCH EXORCISM...





SEN-DOR GESTURES, AND THE TWO CANDLES BEFORE HIM--BLACK LIKE THE PITS OF HELL--SPUTTER INTO FLAME WITH THE FOUL STENCH OF BRIMSTONE...



... AND FROM THE SORCEROUS THROAT OF THE SMOKE OF BURNING INCENSE RISES WITH THE DANK ODOR OF ROTTING LEAVES,



NOW SEN-DOR, ENTRANCED, JOURNEYS BEYOND HIS TIME TO AN AGE WHEN THE SILVER MOON SHONE UPON A VALUSIA STILL IN ITS WILD YOUTH, THE DWELLING PLACE OF INHUMAN CREATURES--HYBRID MONSTERS WHO WERE BOTH MAN AND SNAKE, MAN AND WOLF, MAN AND BAT! AND THEN, IN HIS MIND'S EYE, SEN-DOR SEES THE FIRST TRUE MEN...



... SUDDENLY, KULL'S FLESH CRAWLS, AND A COLD SHIVER RUNS HIS SPINE AS A CHILLING BLAST OF AIR GUSTS THROUGH THE CATACOMBS...



... AND THEN...

... THE HORROR BEGINS!



BUT SEN-DOR'S WORDS ECHO AND RE-ECHO IN THE CAVERNS OF KULL'S MIND, "IF YOU SO MUCH AS TWINGE IN FEAR..."

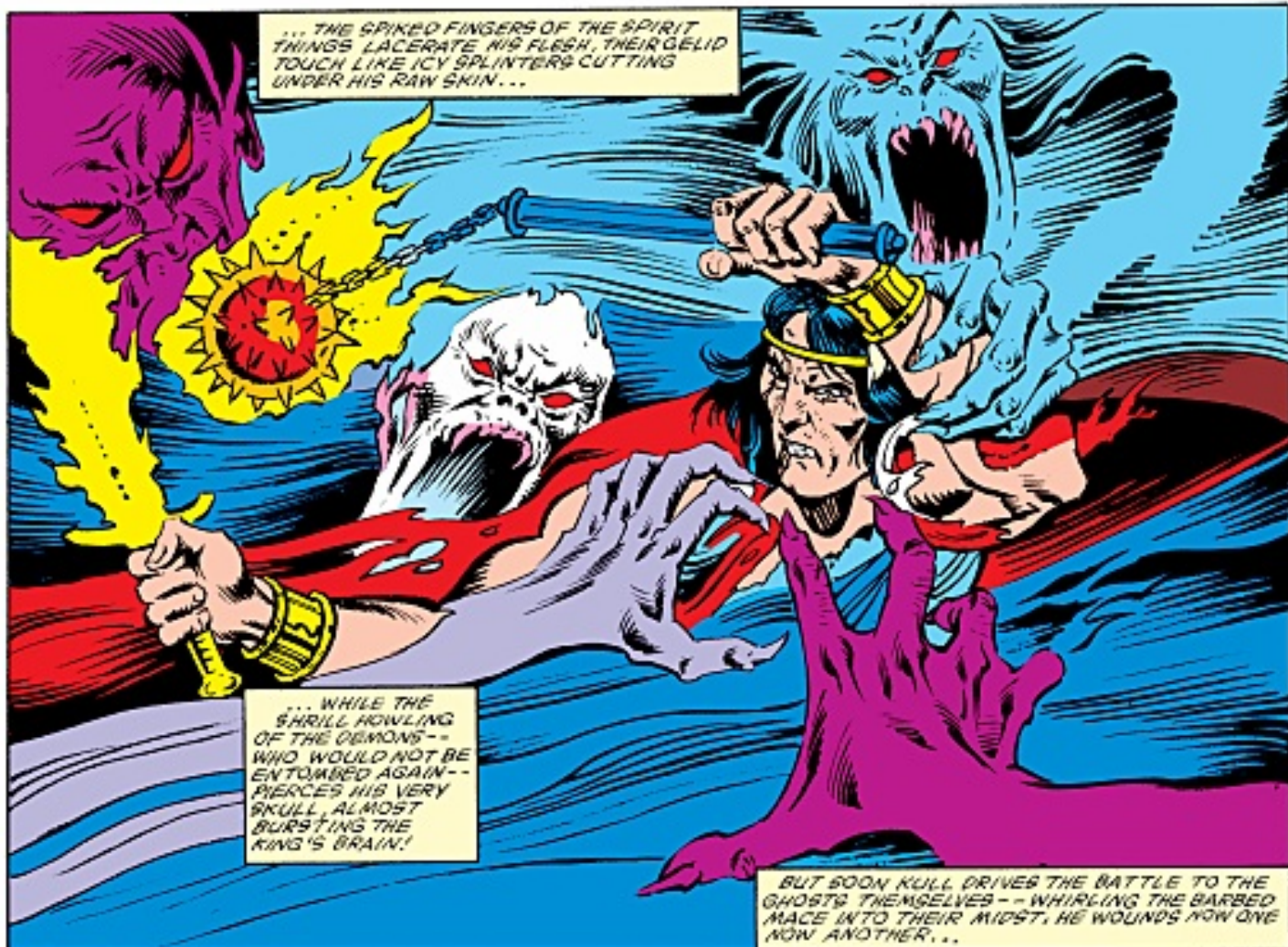
A LESSER HEART WOULD HAVE
FROZEN NOW WITH TERROR
BUT--NO!--THE KING STANDS
DEFIANT AND PROUD AS A REGAL
TIGER...

... AND SUDDENLY, THE
MAGICAL SWORD AND MACE,
RESPONDING TO THE FIERCE-
NESS IN KULL'S BREAST, BLAZE
WITH SUPERNATURAL FLAMES!



THIS WAS A NIGHTMARE UNLIKE
ANYTHING KULL HAD EVER CONCEIVED
IN HIS YOUTHFUL IMAGININGS OF
WEARING VALUSIA'S CROWN...

... THE SPIKED FINGERS OF THE SPIRIT
THINGS LACERATE HIS FLESH, THEIR GELID
TOUCH LIKE ICY SPLINTERS CUTTING
UNDER HIS RAW SKIN...



... WHILE THE
SHRILL HOWLING
OF THE DEMONS--
WHO WOULD NOT BE
ENTOMBED AGAIN--
PIERCES HIS VERY
SKULL, ALMOST
BURSTING THE
KING'S BRAIN!

BUT SOON KULL DRIVES THE BATTLE TO THE
GHOSTS THEMSELVES--WHIRLING THE BARBED
MACE INTO THEIR MIDST, HE WOUNDS NOW ONE
NOW ANOTHER...





THOUGH EVERY MUSCLE IN HIS ARMS ACHES WITH EXHAUSTION...

... AND HE IS COLD AND OVERWEARY...

... KULL DOES NOT CEASE FOR THE MOMENT OF ONE SIGH. HE IS UNAWARE OF TIME AND PLACE...



... UNAWARE OF ALL BUT HIS PLEDGE TO SEN-DOR, 'I SHALL NOT FAIL!'



... UNAWARE, EVEN IN HIS FURY...



... THAT HE HAS HONORED THAT PLEDGE, UNTIL HE HEARS THE WAKING WIZARD'S VOICE...



YOU HAVE REDEEMED VALUSIA, KULL. THE GODS BE PRAISED!

WHEN LAST HE GAZED THROUGH THE RIBS OF THE ANCIENT PORTCULLIS, KULL HAD TRANSGRESSED...



... NOW HE HAD TRIUMPHED. INDEED, VALKA BE PRAISED!



TO SAVE HIS KINGDOM AND HIS BRIDE, KULL
FIGHTS HORRORS BEYOND IMAGINING--
AND FACES THE ULTIMATE BETRAYAL...

The BLOOD OF KINGS

BY DOUG MOENCH AND JOHN BOLTON

